

Life skills: A Research Based Model

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Abstract:

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable us to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are a set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life. Key Life Skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner. The present article highlights the research findings on the core life skills. Based on the mentioned research findings, A model of life skills is developed and which shows the correlation between the core life skills as suggested by the world health organisation. The Life skills model describes that how one core skill is related with other life skills and development of one skill leads to the development of other related skills.

Key terms: *Life skills, Life skills model, psycho-social skills, Human skills.*

We are living in an era when science and technology have indeed exploded in to massive endeavour and achievement at a rapid pace. The new millennium has marked a great transition for the whole mankind and witnessed greater discoveries and opened new vistas of development in the field of science and technology. Life skills are essentially those abilities that promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life.

Education needs to address not only human resource needs of the society, but also the development needs and aspirations of the individuals, their ability to think and reason, build up self respect as well as respect for others, think ahead and plan their future. It looks

particular on recent trends emphasizing education concerning life skills, psychosocial abilities that help people to think, feel, act and interact as individuals and participating members of the society.

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable us to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, in other words psychosocial competency. They are a set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life. The subject varies greatly depending on social norms and community expectations but skills that functions for well-being and aid individuals to develop into active and productive members of their communities are considered as life skills.

The term 'Life Skills' refers to the skills we need to make the most out of life. Life skills are usually associated with managing and living a better quality of life. They help us to accomplish our ambitions and live to our full potential. Any skill that is useful in our life can be considered a life skill.

Life skills have been defined as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO). 'Adaptive' means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances. 'Positive behaviour' implies that a person is forward looking and even in difficult situations, can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions.

Life skill education is the soul of education that can create the shield for human survival on this planet. Life skills education aims to provide students with strategies to make healthy choices that contribute a meaningful life. It facilitates a complete and integrated development of young people to function effectively as social beings and make them socially more sensitive.

Key Life Skills according to World Health Organization

Key Life Skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Essentially, there are two kinds of skills - those related to thinking termed as "thinking skills"; and skills related to dealing with others termed as "social skills". While thinking skills relate to reflection at a personal level,

social skills include interpersonal skills and do not necessarily depend on logical thinking. It is the combination of these two types of skills that are needed for achieving assertive behaviour and negotiating effectively. “Emotional” can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decisions but also in being able to make others agree to one's point of view. To do that, coming to terms first with oneself is important. Thus, self management is an important skill including managing/coping with feelings, emotions, stress and resisting peer and family pressure. Young people as advocates need both thinking and social skills for consensus building and advocacy on issues of concern.

Definition of life skills

There are many different understandings of life skills but no definition is universally accepted. Different organisations attach different meanings to the term. The International Bureau of Education (IBE) derives its understanding from the Delor's four pillars of learning - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together - and defines life skills as personal management and social skills which are necessary for adequate functioning on an independent basis.

UNICEF has defined life skills as psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important. The choice of, and emphasis on, different skills will vary according to the topic. For example decision making may feature strongly in HIV/AIDS prevention whereas conflict management may be more prominent in a peace education programme. According to UNICEF it is ultimately the interrelations between the skills that produces powerful behavioural outcomes, especially where this approach is supported by other strategies such as media, policies and health services.

The Mental Health Promotion and Policy (MHP) team in World Health Organisation (WHO) Department of Mental Health has produced this definition of life skills: “Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights” (WHO 1999).

Life skills defined in a general way mean a mix of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and values and designate the possession of some skill and know-how to do something, or reach an aim. They include competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, ability to

organise, social and communication skills, adaptability, problem solving, ability to co-operate on a democratic basis that are needed for actively shaping a peaceful future. A number of such lists exist which show a high degree of correspondence, though few lists are in complete agreement.

The constituents of generally defined life skills can be described in the following way: a) they include the abilities necessary to apply the conceptual thinking and reflection in concrete situations; b) they imply capacities to be involved in effective interaction with the environment and provide an appropriate motivational attitude; c) they involve psychological prerequisites for successful performance, such as problem solving capacities, self-confidence and skills for critical thinking (Dohmen 1996).

The Ten core Life Skills as laid down by WHO are:

1. **Self-awareness-** Self-awareness includes recognition of ‘self’, our character, our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Developing self-awareness can help us to recognize when we are stressed or feel under pressure. It is often a prerequisite to effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy with others. *Components of self-awareness:* Objectivity, Introspection ability, Ability to accept strengths and weaknesses, Reflectivity, Accepting self as it is.
2. **Empathy** - To have a successful relationship with our loved ones and society at large, we need to understand and care about other peoples’ needs, desires and feelings. Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. Without empathy, our communication with others will amount to one-way traffic. Worst, we will be acting and behaving according to our self-interest and are bound to run into problems. No man is an island, no woman either! We grow up in relationships with many people – parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts, classmates, friends and neighbours. When we understand ourselves as well as others, we are better prepared to communicate our needs and desires. We will be more equipped to say what we want people to know, present our thoughts and ideas and tackle delicate issues without offending other people. At the same time, we will be able to elicit support from others, and win their understanding.

Empathy can help us to accept others, who may be very different from ourselves. This can improve social interactions, especially, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity.

Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behaviour towards people in need of care and assistance, or tolerance, as is the case with AIDS sufferers, or people with mental disorders, who may be stigmatized and ostracized by the very people they depend upon for support. *Components of empathy:* Sympathy, Sensitivity, Objectivity, Social inclination and responsibility and Social obligations. Empathy helps in maintaining interpersonal relations, maintaining stress, maintaining emotions, self awareness and also helps in effective communication.

3. **Critical thinking-** Critical thinking is an ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking can contribute to health by helping us to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.
4. **Creative thinking-** Creative thinking is a novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components- fluency (generating new ideas), flexibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something new), and elaboration (building on other ideas). *Components of creative thinking:* Divergent thinking, Innovativeness, Novelty, Fluency, Flexibility, Unconventionality, Radicalism, Boldness, Originality, Independence and Elaboration. Creative thinking skill helps in problem solving, and decision making.
5. **Decision making-** Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for health. It can teach people how to actively make decisions about their actions in relation to healthy assessment of different options and, what effects these different decisions are likely to have. *Components of decision making:* Analytic and synthetic abilities, Self-knowledge, Objectivity, Rationality, General intelligence, Knowledge of the situation, Emotional stability, Logical thinking and Creative thinking. Decision making skill helps in problem solving, maintaining interpersonal relations, and also helps in maintaining stress.
6. **Problem solving-** Problem solving helps us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain. *Components of problem solving:* Self-knowledge, Positive attitude, Divergent thinking, Objectivity, Rationality, Intelligence, Emotional stability and Analytic and synthetic ability. Problem solving helps in maintaining

interpersonal relations, maintaining stress, decision making and also helps in maintaining emotions.

7. **Interpersonal relationship-** Interpersonal relationship skills help us to relate in positive ways with the people we interact with. This may mean being able to make and keep friendly relationships, which can be of great importance to our mental and social well-being. It may mean keeping, good relations with family members, which are an important source of social support. It may also mean being able to end relationships constructively. **Components of interpersonal relationships:** Empathy, Sympathy, Sensitivity, Tolerance, Positive attitude, Reciprocity, Etiquettes, Healthy distance and Lack of prejudices and stereotypes. Interpersonal relation skill helps in empathy, maintaining emotions and also helps in effective communication.
8. **Effective communication-** Effective communication means that we are able to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations. This means being able to express opinions and desires, and also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need. **Components of effective communication :** Analytic and synthetic abilities, Expressive skills, Non-verbal skills, Posture and gesture, Presentation, Objectivity, Quickness to react on the spur of the movement, Creativity, Sensitivity, Imaginability, Patient listening and Knowledge ability. Effective communication skill helps in maintaining interpersonal relations, maintaining stress, and also helps in maintaining emotions.
9. **Coping with stress-** Coping with stress means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle and learning how to relax. **Components of coping with stress:** Resilience, Reality orientation, Self-awareness, Relaxation ability, Entertain ability, Planning ability, Objectivity, Ability to understand from others perspectives and Ability to avoid lopsidedness in life. Coping with stress helps in problem solving, maintaining interpersonal relations, maintaining emotions and also helps in effective communication.
10. **Coping with emotions-** Coping with emotions means involving recognizing emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions like anger or sadness can have negative effects on our health if we do not respond appropriately. **Components of coping**

with emotions: Empathy, Sympathy, Emotional intelligence, Objectivity, Resilience, Critical thinking, Sense of proportions, Self-awareness and Analytic and synthetic abilities. Coping with emotions helps in Decision making, maintaining interpersonal relations, maintaining stress, problem solving and also helps in effective communication.

The Importance of Life Skills

In a constantly changing environment, having life skills is an essential part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. The dramatic changes in global economies over the past five years have been matched with the transformation in technology and these are all impacting on education, the workplace and our home life. To cope with the increasing pace and change of modern life, students need new life skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration. Today's students will have many new jobs over the course of their lives, with associated pressures and the need for flexibility.

Benefits for the individual

In everyday life, the development of life skills helps students to:

- Find new ways of thinking and problem solving
- Recognise the impact of their actions and teaches them to take responsibility for what they do rather than blame others
- Build confidence both in spoken skills and for group collaboration and cooperation
- Analyse options, make decisions and understand why they make certain choices outside the classroom
- Develop a greater sense of self-awareness and appreciation for others

Benefits for Employment

While students work hard to get good grades, many still struggle to gain employment. According to research by the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) in 2011 employers were looking not just for academic success but key employability skills including:

- The ability to self-manage, solve problems and understand the business environment
- Working well as part of a team
- Time and people management
- Agility and adaptability to different roles and flexible working environments

- The potential to lead by influence

Benefits for Society

The more we develop life skills individually, the more these affect and benefit the world in which we live:

- Recognising cultural awareness and citizenship makes international cooperation easier
- Respecting diversity allows creativity and imagination to flourish developing a more tolerant society
- Developing negotiation skills, the ability to network and empathise can help to build resolutions rather than resentments

Supporting studies for Life Skills Model

Beeken (1997) did find that older students had a more positive self-concept, were more self-confident and had higher confidence in decision-making.

Wolff, Pescosolido, and Druskat (2002) provide in their work that there is a connection between empathy and cognitive skills.

The use of emotional intelligence can lead to productive outcomes at the individual and organizational level (Weisinger, 1998). This is further confirmed by the overwhelming majority of employers who feel emotional intelligence, specifically self-awareness, is critical to success in business (Goleman, 1998). High self-awareness is the foundation from which all other emotional intelligence stems from (Weisinger, 1998). Self-awareness if is highly correlated with positive social interaction (Lopes, Brackett, Nezlek, Schultz, Sellin, & Salovey, 2003).

Boler (1999) argues that emotions indicate what deserves attention and moral scrutiny to the individual. Thus, emotional intelligence plays a critical role in ethical decision making. Conversely, Elder (1997) contends critical thinking is the key to emotional intelligence. This connection and development of these skills are critical to the foundation of leadership education.

Researchers have explored links between creativity and problem solving before and have come up with a variety of answers (Isaksen, 1995). For example, Guilford (1977) suggested that problem solving and creative thinking were closely related. Creative thinking produced new outcomes, and problem solving involved producing novel responses and

outcomes to new situations. Problem solving often has creative aspects, but creativity is not always problem solving. Newell, Shaw, and Simon (1962) suggested that “creative activity appears . . . simply to be a special class of problem solving activity characterized by novelty, unconventionality, persistence, and difficulty in problem formulation” (p. 63).

Self-awareness is positively correlated with self-acceptance and quality of interpersonal relationships. This means that self-acceptance and self-awareness tend to increase and decrease together and self-awareness and quality of relationships do the same. However, their directions of influence remain unclear. What is known is that the relationships between self-awareness and self-acceptance, and self-awareness and quality relationships are complex and may also be reciprocal. (Camille Fung, 2011)

In a situation where young students benefit from life skills, they take responsibility for their well-being, make healthy decisions and generally lead a safe and sound lifestyle throughout adolescence and adulthood, which ultimately enables them to perform taking advantage of their potentials and become prepared to encounter future needs and changes. Lack of information about appropriate lifestyles endangers student’s health. (Balasundari Kr. and Edward William Benjamin A, 2014)

Prakash Alex (2013) attempted to explore the relation between Social Intelligence and ten Core Life Skills at Higher Secondary School level, the results of the study are as follows.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Problem solving skill is 0.06. This means that there is Negligible Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 2.12, which is significant at 0.05 levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there exists a significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Problem solving skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Decision making skill is 0.06. This means that there is Negligible Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 2.18, which is significant at 0.05 levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there exists a significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Decision making skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Self esteem skill is 0.012. This means that there is Negligible Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t value was found to be 1.10, which is not significant at both

the levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there is no significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and the Self esteem skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Empathy skill is 0.014. This means that there is Negligible Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t value was found to be 1.34, which is not significant at both the levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there is no significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Empathy skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Interpersonal skill is 0.401. This means that there is Moderate Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t value was found to be 11.00, which is significant at 0.01 levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there exists a significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Interpersonal skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Effective Communication skill is 0.6816. This means that there is Moderate Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 21.58, which is significant at 0.01 levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there exists a significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Interpersonal skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Critical Thinking skill is 0.073. This means that there is Negligible Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 2.48, which is significant at 0.05 levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there exists a significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Critical Thinking skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Creative Thinking skill is 0.066. This means that there is Negligible Positive correlation between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 2.09, which is significant at 0.05 levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there exists a significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Creative Thinking skill of Higher Secondary school students.

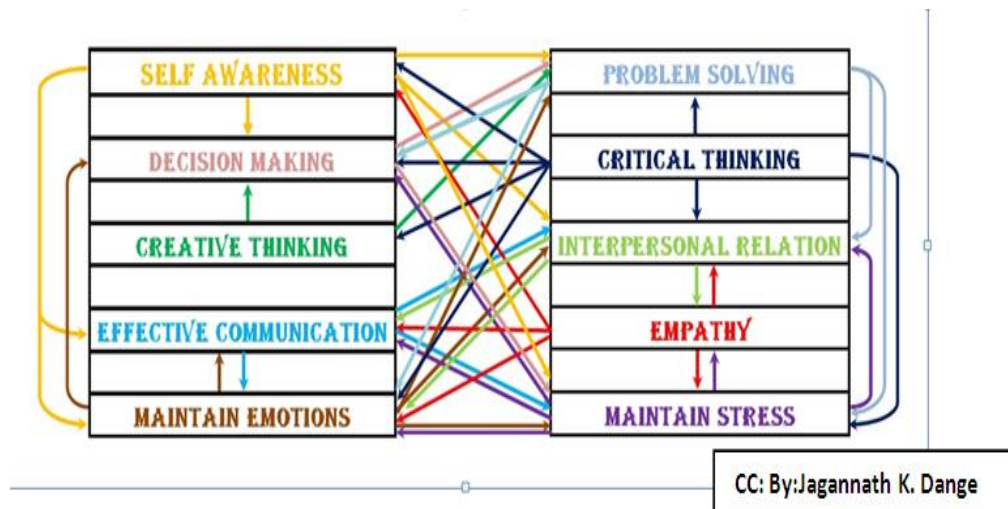
The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Coping of emotion skill is -0.02. This means that there is Negligible Negative correlation

between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 1.27, which is not significant at both the levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there is no significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Coping of emotion skill of Higher Secondary school students.

The coefficient of correlation obtained between the scores of Social Intelligence and Coping of stress skill is -0.033. This means that there is Negligible Negative correlation between the two components. The Calculated t-value was found to be 1.39, which is not significant at both the levels. Thus it can be interpreted that there is no significant relationship between the scores of Social Intelligence and Coping of stress skill of Higher Secondary school students.

Based on the above mentioned research findings, A model of life skills is developed and which shows the correlation between the core life skills as suggested by the world health organisation

Life Skills Model



The above model describes that, the skill self awareness is related with Effective communication, Decision making, maintaining emotions, problem solving, Interpersonal relations and maintaining stress. The development of self awareness leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill Decision making is related with problem solving and maintaining stress. The development of decision making leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill creative thinking is related with decision making and problem solving, The development of creative thinking leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill Effective communication is related with maintaining emotions; inter personal relations and maintaining stress. The development of Effective communication leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill maintaining emotions is related with Effective communication; Decision making, Inter-personal relations, Problem solving and maintaining stress. The development of maintaining emotions leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill Problem solving is related with maintaining emotions; Decision making, Inter-personal relations, and maintaining stress. The development of Problem solving leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill critical thinking is related with Problem solving; maintaining emotions, Decision making, Inter-personal relations, self-awareness, maintaining stress and Creative thinking. The development of critical thinking leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill Inter personal relation is related with Effective communication, maintaining emotions; and Empathy. The development of Inter personal relation leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill Empathy is related with Effective communication, maintaining emotions, Inter personal relation and maintaining stress. The development of Empathy leads to the development of other related skills.

The skill maintaining stress is related with Effective communication, maintaining emotions, decision making and Empathy. The development of Maintaining stress leads to the development of other related skills.

Therefore, life skills are a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills, which can help people, to make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self management skills that may help an individual to lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. Most development professionals agree that life skills are generally applied in the context of health and social events. Life skills empower young people to take positive action to protect them and promote health and positive social relationships. Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are essential tools for understanding one's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, the individual is able to discern available opportunities and prepare to face possible threats. This leads to the development of

a social awareness of the concerns of one's family and society. Subsequently, it is possible to identify problems that arise within both the family and society. With life skills, one is able to explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issue as it arises. It also entails being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others. Life skills enable effective communication, for example, being able to differentiate between hearing and listening and ensuring that messages are transmitted accurately to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretations.

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